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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 009595

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EC](#) [CO](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT GUTIERREZ TO RETURN TO ECUADOR,
PREPARED TO FACE JAIL, WANTS TO RUN FOR PRESIDENT

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

11. (S) Former Ecuadorian president Lucio Gutierrez told poloffs October 5 that he intends to return to Ecuador, perhaps within weeks, and expects to be jailed on his arrival. Gutierrez said he wants to run for president in 2006 and would like the U.S. to ensure that his life is protected while in jail and that any charges against him be tried fairly. His former foreign minister, Patricio Zuquilanda, hopes to travel to the U.S. mid-October to brief the USG on Gutierrez's plans. End summary.

Gutierrez to Return to Ecuador Soon, Plans Presidential Bid

12. (S) Former Ecuadorian president Lucio Gutierrez told poloffs at a lunch October 5 that he would return to Ecuador "as soon as possible" and expects to be arrested and imprisoned. "I am prepared to spend two, three, four months in jail to clear my name," he said. According to Gutierrez, the GOE has "persecuted" him and his family. The GOE would not be able to prove any charges against him, he predicted. Gutierrez said he would go back "shortly" after a book launch in Bogota October 12. Gutierrez, who was accompanied by his former foreign minister Patricio Zuquilanda at the lunch hosted by prominent Colombian political figure/businessman David Turbay, said he intended to run for president in October 2006. He claimed that public and private polls suggest he has a solid chance of victory if allowed to run.

13. (S) Gutierrez said he expected the Ecuadorian media to oppose his presidential bid, but with a less partisan tone than that which he claimed they displayed during his tenure. Both Gutierrez and Zuquilanda said the Ecuadorian media felt somewhat chastened by their role in the events that led to Gutierrez fleeing the country in April 2005. Gutierrez acknowledged that he has few funds to mount a TV campaign and suggested that he would instead run a "people's campaign" that relied on personal meetings and rallies, although he implied that unnamed companies in Ecuador would supply funds as well.

Free Speech and Political Asylum Conditions

14. (S) Gutierrez acknowledged that he faced certain restrictions on his conduct and speech while in Colombia as a result of the GOC's October 4 decision to grant his request for political asylum. Gutierrez said he is not supposed to comment on internal Colombian or Ecuadorian politics, or do or say anything that would negatively affect Colombian-Ecuadorian relations. He argued, however, that his planned October 12 book launch was an attempt to "set the record straight" on factual matters relating to his fall from power. He also said he would respond to any questions posed by journalists; "I still have the right to free speech," he said.

Chavez is Threat to Entire World

15. (S) Gutierrez and, especially, Zuquilanda, spent considerable time denouncing Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez as a threat to "the entire world, not just South America." "We must unite as friends to combat Chavez," Zuquilanda said on several occasions. Zuquilanda described a 2004 Cabinet meeting at which the GOE Defense Minister informed the Cabinet that the Venezuelan ambassador in Quito was using his embassy to fund travel to and training in Venezuela for Ecuadorian radicals, whose objective was "Marxist revolution" in Ecuador. Zuquilanda said he called the ambassador in and told him he had in his desk a diplomatic note declaring the ambassador persona non grata unless he clarified the matter. Zuquilanda said the ambassador attempted weak explanations, then mumbled apologies, without denying the accusations. The ambassador said he would ensure nothing like it ever happened again.

Gutierrez Claims Ecuador Heading in Anti-U.S. Direction

16. (S) Gutierrez and Zuquilanda said that Ecuadorian president Palacio intended to close down the U.S. FOL at Manta. If this happened, Zuquilanda said, it would be a "disaster" for the Manta economy. In Gutierrez's view, Economy Minister Rafael Correa is strongly anti-American and intends to run for president in 2006 on a populist platform that would "target American interests." Both said that anti-American sentiment had increased in Ecuador in recent years and argued that the U.S. should "massively" increase public affairs efforts.

FARC Bases in Ecuador

17. (S) Gutierrez said "of course" the FARC has bases in Ecuador, but he said that when he was president he tried to attack them when discovered. Gutierrez said the 600km-plus border with Colombia makes it tough to police; "how can you tell who is and who is not FARC if they all wear civilian clothes?" he noted.

Former Foreign Minister Plans U.S. Travel

18. (S) Zuquilanda said he wanted to travel to the U.S. during the second or third week of October to brief USG officials on Gutierrez's plans. When asked if that travel proposal meant that he would not return to Ecuador until Zuquilanda returned, Gutierrez said, "no, I want to go back as soon as possible."

Comment

19. (S) Gutierrez seemed calm and did not appear concerned about being jailed, a prospect he clearly believes is likely. He did not ask for any U.S. assistance, except to ensure that the GOE protected him while in jail and, if possible, ensure that any charges against him were tried on the merits. Zuquilanda was considerably more "political" in his comments, evidently trying to persuade the U.S. that the Gutierrez/Zuquilanda combination would be a strong U.S. ally in combating Chavez and the FARC.
WOOD